

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6157

INFO USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 3052

DEPARTMENT PASS DIA

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: IZ, MOPS

SUBJECT: JOURNALIST'S REPORT ON VISIT TO IRAQI KURDESTAN

1. BEIRUT-BASED CORRESPONDENT FOR NEWSDAY AND OBSERVOR JOE FITCHETT ASKED APPOINTMENT WITH POLCOUN TO DISCUSS HIS OBSERVATIONS IN IRAQI KURD COUNTRY WHERE HAS SPENT LAST TEN DAYS. DESCRIBING PRESENT POSITIONS OF TWO SIDES, HE SAID PESH MERGHE AREA OF CONTROL IS FARTHER FORWARD THAN URING HIS LAST VISIT AND HAS COMPLETELY ENGULFED MANY GOVERNMENT OUTPOSTS WHICH CAN NOW BE SUPPLIED ONLY BY AIR. EVEN SOME GOVT POSTS IN CONTACT WITH MAIN FORCES CANNOT BE SUPPLIED BY ROAD BECAUSE QTE WORST WEATHER SINCE THE WAR UNQTE HAS MADE QUAGMIRE OF MANY SECONDARY ROADS. KURDS ARE DOUBLY GRATEFUL FOR BAD WEATHER WHICH THEY SEE AS THEIR BEST AIR DEFENSE. GOI HAS PULLED BACK SEVERAL FORWARD POSTS NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE OF KURDISH PRESSURE AS BECAUSE OF LOGISTICS DIFFICULTIES.

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2. KURDS ARE EXPECTING ALL-OUT ATTACK ANY MOMENT. FITCHETT

WAS EXTREMELY IMPRESSED BY THEIR HIGH MORALE, GOOD ORGANIZATION AND APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO SEE CONFRONTATION THROUGH TO END. ON EARLIER VISIT HE HAD NOTICED KURDS FROM CITIES WERE BEGINNING TO JOIN MOVEMENT BUT THIS TIME HE FELT THAT VIRTUALLY ENTIRE KURDISH POPULATION HAD LEFT JOBS AND COMFORT OF TOWNS TO JOIN BARZANI FORCES. HE SAID KDP STRATEGY AND DISCIPLINE ESPECIALLY IMPRESSED HIM; THERE IS A REAL PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION WITH HEAVY EMPHASIS ON TRADITIONAL KURDISH PRACTICES. FOR INSTANCE LEADERS, INCLUDING BARZANI, RISE WHEN PETITIONERS ENTER AND TREAT VISITORS, HOWEVER HUMBLE, AS EQUALS. WOMEN IN MOVEMENT CONTINUE IN VERY SECONDARY ROLE. KDP LEADERS ARE OPENLY SCORNFUL OF COMMUNIST QTE LIBERATION UNQTE MODELS.

3. FITCHETT DID NOT SEE BARZANI HIMSELF THIS TRIP AND HEARD HE WAS TRAVELLING ABROAD TO DRUM UP SUPPORT. KURDS ARE HOPING FOR POLITICAL BACKING FROM UNSPECIFIED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES (FITCHETT GOT IMPRESSION THEY ARE THINKING OF YUGOSLAVIA AND ONE OR MORE SCANDINAVIAN STATES). THEY ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE NEWS AND PROPAGANDA BROADCASTS. FITCHETT VISITED COMPLETELY EQUIPPED UNDERGROUND BROADCASTING STUDIO WITH 20 KW TRANSMITTER AND OTHER BRITISH-BUILT EQUIPMENT.

4. MILITARILY, KURDS HE SAW THROUGHOUT AREA WERE WELL EQUIPPED WITH MODERN WEAPONS AND PLENTY OF AMMUNITION AND APPEARED READY TO FIGHT. DURING ONE AMBUSH OPERATION HE WAS ON BIG PROBLEM WAS TO HOLD BACK KURDISH TROOPS EAGER TO MIX IT UP AT CLOSE QUARTERS WITH IRAQI SOLDIERS. KURDS CARRY NEW CZECH BRNO WEAPONS OR IRANIAN-MADE BRENS, FITCHETT SAID, AND HAVE 60, 82 AND 124 MILLIMETER MORTARS, DASCHKA MACHINE GUNS, RPF-7'S AND 20 MILLIMETER AND HEAVIER ANTI-AIRCRAFT WEAPONS (FITCHETT SAID LATTER WERE ONLY WEAPONSHE WAS NOT RPT NOT ALLOWED TO PHOTOGRAPH AND SPECULATED THAT THIS WAS BECAUSE THEY WERE OF US ORIGIN). KURDS ARE SUPPLIED BY WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS QTE CONTINUOUS FLOW OF TRUCK TRAFFIC FROM IRAN UNQTE. HE SAYS KURDS TOLD HIM SUPPLIES MOVE THROUGH TWO IRANIAN MILITARY CAMPS KNOWN AS 202 AND 204. HE FELT MAIN KURDISH MILITARY VULNERABILITIES WERE POOR RADIO COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN UNITS AND LACK OF HOSPITAL FACILITIES.

5. KURDS HOPE THAT BY KEEPING IRAQI GOVERNMENT INVOLVED IN MILITARY
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CONFLICT FOR PROTRACTED PERIOD AND CAUSING CONTINUED CASUALTIES THEY CAN BRING IT DOWN. THEY SAID THEY WERE READY TO TAKE AS MANY CASUALTIES AS NECESSARY TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, SEEING NO REALISTIC HOPE FOR KURDISH PEOPLE UNDER PRESENT BA'ATHISTS. RUMORS ARE WIDESPREAD THAT IRAQIS WILL USE POISON GAS AND CONCENTRATED AIR STRIKES WHEN WEATHER IMPROVES TO TRY TO DESTROY KURDISH RESISTANCE QUICKLY.
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